

Barbara Main, and to the various people whose properties I have regularly explored, in particular the Stewarts of Busselton and the Kittlers of South Kumminin.

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OCCURRENCE OF THE WHITE-WINGED FAIRY-WREN, *MALURUS LEUCONOTUS*, AT MAYLANDS, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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INTRODUCTION

Storr and Johnstone (1988) describe the occurrence of the White-winged Fairy-wren, *Malurus leuconotus*, at Maylands as being casual, but my observations on two groups there indicate that it was resident. In view of the subsequent destruction of its habitat it is worthwhile recording my observations.

THE AREA

The western half of the Maylands Peninsula, where the two groups occurred, was mudflat. The original vegetation appears to have been sedge,

samphire *Halosarcia* sp., and *Isolepis oldfieldiana*, but at the time of my observations the primary vegetation was exotic grasses such as wild oats, *Avena* sp., veldt grasses, *Ehrharta* spp. and Pampas Grass, *Cortaderia selloaria*, which varied in density from isolated clumps to dense thickets. The peripheral vegetation was mostly samphire and the *Casuarina* and *Melaleuca* there appeared to have been planted.

The two groups of White-winged Fairy-wren had exclusive territories. One occupied the northern half of the mudflat while the second occupied the southern half. Both groups ranged over their entire territories, from the peripheral vegetation (at times partly covered by river overflow) to the beds of grasses, even when they were new growth and only some 15 centimetres tall.

The firing of the grass beds on the northern half of the mudflat was almost an annual occurrence in summer and the group there used to retreat to a small patch of samphire which survived the fires. Firing of the southern half was more casual and less extensive and the group there had recourse to surviving samphire and Pampas Grass.

The building of a golf course on the mudflat took about two years and was largely completed by October 1989. It destroyed the major part of the fairy-wren's habitat and they have not been seen since.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE WHITE-WINGED FAIRY-WREN

I first observed the species at Maylands in December 1983 and subsequently learnt that this, the northern group, consisted of one male and six female-plumaged birds. The group was intermittently observed until May 1987. A particularly severe fire razed the territory subsequently and only three female-plumaged birds survived, the surviving patch of samphire being their focus.

The southern group was first observed in June 1984. It initially had one male and about six female-plumaged birds but sometimes two fully plumaged males were present. There was no direct evidence of breeding but on one occasion the population suddenly doubled from about 10 to about 20. This group was less frequently observed due to the difficulty of locating the birds in the dense vegetation and to my aversion to walking through it. My last observation of this group was in August 1986 but it probably survived until the golf course was formed.

A third group probably still survives in the vegetation lining the Swan River south-east of the bowling club and the housing bordering Clarkson Road, Maylands. This location is 1 km from the mudflat under discussion. I have seen the species there on four occasions: 25 and 30 September 1984, 6 October 1984 and 22 August 1985. However I have not visited this locality since 1986.

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